ISO Guide 65 Accreditation for Certification Bodies

1 Purpose

This Procedure provides the requirements to be met in designing an ISO Guide 65 Program. It also provides the requirements used for the objective evaluation of ISO Guide 65 Programs that are submitted for approval and monitored by the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), Livestock and Seed (LS) Program, Audit, Review, and Compliance (ARC) Branch. The ARC Branch is designated as the competent authority for the assessment of organic certification bodies under *ISO Guide 65 – General requirements for bodies operating certification systems*. This ISO Guide 65 Program is a voluntary conformity assessment and accreditation service provided by the ARC Branch under the Quality Systems Verification Program. This service is available to organic certification bodies to facilitate the marketing and distribution of certified agricultural products.

2 Scope

The provisions of this Procedure apply to U.S. and international certification bodies operating in the U.S. that certify operations or systems that produce, process, or distribute agricultural products. The scope of accreditation is limited to certification of products produced in the United States.

3 References

ISO Guide 65 – General requirements for bodies operating product certification systems
ARC 1000 Procedure, Quality Systems Verification Programs General Policies and Procedures
ARC 1115 Procedure, Program Review Committee Procedures (Internal Procedure)
ARC 1115 Form, QSVP Committee Meeting Minutes (Internal Form)

4 Responsibilities

Certification bodies must meet all applicable policies, procedures, and requirements outlined in this Procedure, *ISO Guide 65 – General requirements for bodies operating certification systems,* and *ARC 1000 Procedure, Quality Systems Verification Program General Policies and Procedure.*

The ARC Branch must meet all applicable policies, procedures, and requirements outlined in this Procedure, and *ARC 1000 Procedure, Quality Systems Verification Program General Policies and Procedure.*

Any suggested changes to this Procedure should be submitted via email to the ARC Branch Program Manager.

5   Audit Frequency

All approved programs will be audited at least once per year. However, more frequent audits may be conducted (1) if either numerous minor non-conformances or a major non-conformance are identified during the audit; (2) if customer complaints indicate an ongoing problem; or (3) as directed by the ARC Branch Chief.

Audits include a review of inspection activities at one or more producers and one or more processors under contract with the certification body.

6   Program Review Committee

Programs will be reviewed by the Program Review Committee for approval, disapproval, or recommendations. The review is conducted in accordance to *ARC 1115 Procedure, Program Review Committee Procedures*. The Program Review Committee makes the final decision regarding approval or disapproval.

7   Listing of Approved Programs and Programs Under Review

Approved programs and programs under review are listed on the ARC Branch ISO Guide 65 website at http://www.ams.usda.gov./lsg/arc/iso65.htm. Information regarding these programs includes:
   a)   Certification body's name;
   b)   Certification body's address, and
   c)   Certification body's contact information (phone, fax, and/or email).

Information regarding approved programs also includes:
   d)   Certificate number (approval number); and
   e)   Renewal date.

10   Certificate of Conformance

A *Certificate of Conformance* is issued to all approved programs. The Certificate identifies the certification body's name, location, scope, standards assessed, certificate number, issue date, and renewal date. Certificates are valid for up to one year and may be renewed provided systems are maintained as described in program documentation and subsequent audits provide objective evidence of ongoing conformance.

Companies that withdraw from the ISO Guide 65 Program or that are disapproved must return the *Certificate of Conformance* to the ARC Branch.

11   References to Official Certificates and Accreditation

Certification bodies with valid *Certificates of Conformance* may make references to AMS accreditation in company brochures, advertisements, and official documents, provided remarks or references are complete and not misleading. Acceptable references may include, for example, "[Name of certifier] product certifications are accredited under ISO Guide 65 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture."

7   Program Requirements

Certification bodies must submit a documented program in accordance with *ARC 1000 Procedure, Quality Systems Verification Programs General Policies and Procedures, Section 6 Requirements, Clause 1 Application for Service:*

The documented program must include the following documents:

1. Quality manual as described in *ISO Guide 65 – General requirements for bodies operating certification systems*, section 4.5.3;
2. Documentation addressing *ISO Guide 65 – General requirements for bodies operating certification systems* requirements;
3. A current list of clients certified by the certification body covered under the scope of the assessment, including locations and products certified; and
4. Samples of brochures, advertisements, labels, or other publicly available documents describing the certification services offered.